

# PRE-MENSTRUAL SYNDROME

Arizona Department of Corrections  
Health Service Bureau

Inmate Wellness Program  
HEP 1038- 01/06

## Definition

**Pre-menstrual Syndrome (PMS)** is a clearly identifiable cluster of symptoms that women experience each month preceding the start of menstruation. PMS is believed to affect between one-third and one-half of all American women between 20-50 years of age.

The symptoms begin 10-14 days before the onset of menstruation and usually become progressively worse until menstruation begins.

## Symptoms

The most common symptoms of PMS can be grouped into four main categories:

- Anxiety, irritability, mood swings and nervous tension
- Depression, insomnia, lethargy and confusion
- Bloating, weight gain, headaches and breast tenderness
- Increase in appetite, cravings for sugar and/or salt and fatigue

Other common symptoms include crying spells, constipation, and muscle aches and pains. The severity of PMS varies from woman to woman—some experience only a few symptoms, while others have many. Also, the discomfort felt as a result of PMS symptoms ranges from mild to severe.

## Causes

The exact cause of PMS is not known. The cause may be chemical, hormonal, or even nutritional. Heredity also seems to play a

part, but specific symptoms may differ between sisters or between a mother and daughter. One thing is certain though: To be classified as PMS, symptoms must occur between ovulation and menstruation – i.e., appear anytime within two weeks before the menstrual period, and disappear shortly after the period begins. (PMS is thought to cease with menopause.)

## Treatment

Although there is no single “cure” for PMS, many women have found that they can control the symptoms by making changes in their lifestyle. The following suggestions have been helpful for many women:

- Not skipping meals
- Avoid caffeine (and alcohol after release)
- Avoiding sweets or sugary foods (such as syrups or honey)
- Limiting salty or fatty foods
- Drinking plenty of water
- Increasing calcium (found in milk, cheese, or yogurt)
- Exercise for at least 15 minutes three times a week (if available)
- Try to reduce the amount of stress
- Get plenty of sleep to prevent tiredness
- Limiting or quitting smoking
- Eating fresh fruits and vegetables if available